United States Army

African American Market Exploration

Young Adult and Influencer Discoveries

June 2003

Background

- The United States Army recruitment numbers of African Americans have posted a decline in the recent past.

- There is concern regarding the ASVAB ratings among African American recruits.

- The Army is interested in understanding how to improve communication with the African American market in order to generate more interest among higher aptitude recruits.

- Conducted 18 Discovery Sessions
  - Civilian groups in two markets: Jackson, Mississippi and Detroit, Michigan
  - Military groups in Ft. Knox

- Spoke to a total of 116 African American respondents segmented by life stage and gender. Specifically, we spoke to groups of:

  Civilians Military
  - High School Students -- MOS Combat Arms
  - College Students -- MOS CSS
  - Parents of High School & College Students -- Activated Reservists
  - College Stop-Outs/Drop-Outs

Objectives

- Understand the key influences of young African American men and women as they plan their futures
- Identify current perceptions of and associations that young African American men and women have with the Army
- Determine how 9/11 and the war with Iraq impacts propensity for service
- Gain insights into relevancy of Army General Market Copy
- Learn soldiers’ perceptions and stories of Army life (MOS)

Lifestyle

Points of Influence

Family impacts life values. Entertainment impacts lifestyle. Experience defines their perspective.

Life experience as an individual is the main source of strength, and influence for decision-making

Mother figure is dominant, affects life-outlook and deep seeded values

Affects individual style and tastes - immediate gratification

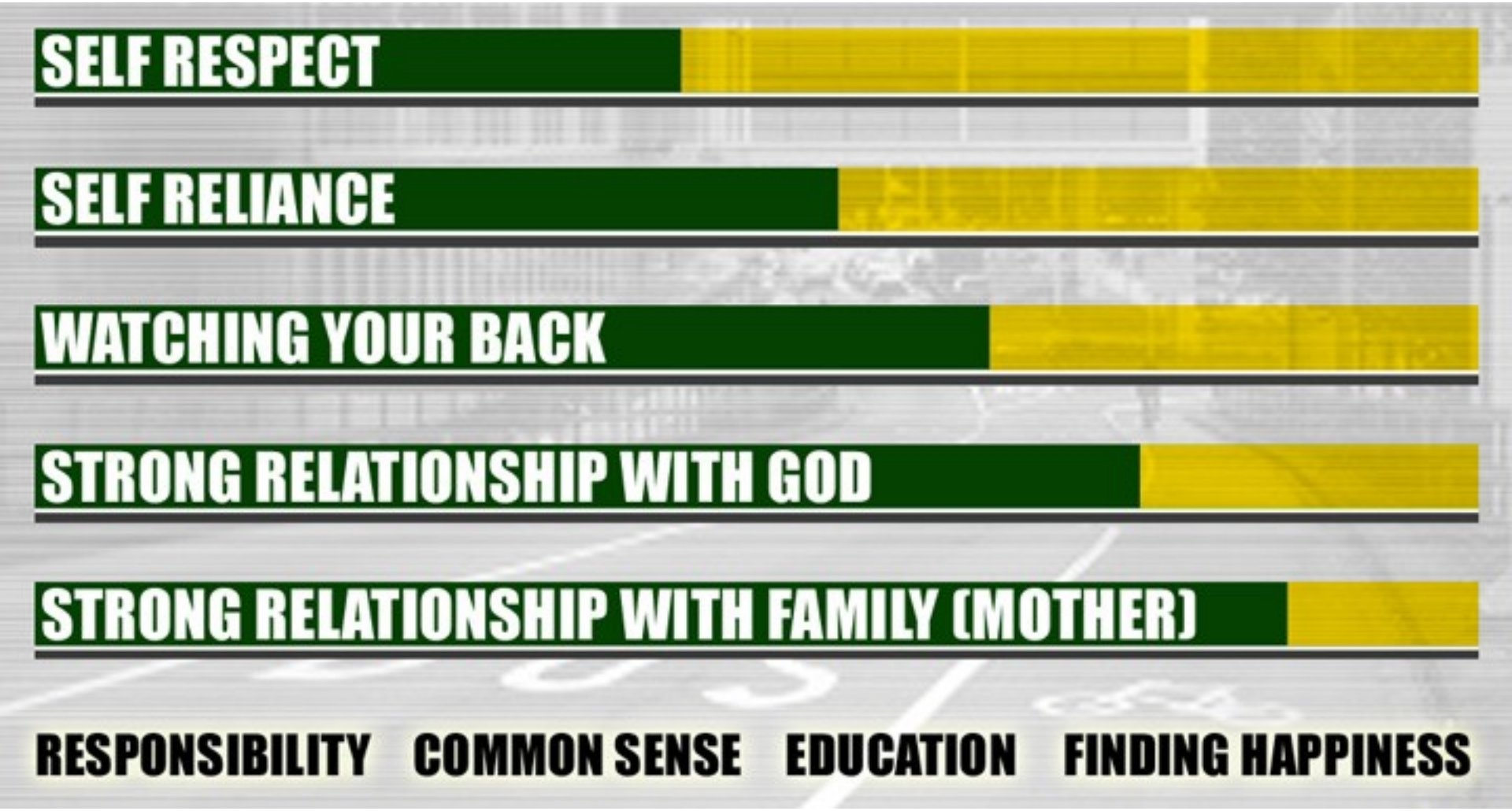
Impacts definitions of success – independence and monetary perspective

Religion is a pillar – as it connects self, family and community

Community is powerful in supporting a sense of self

Being African American influences their outlook on life, perceptions of available opportunities and development of personal goals

Code of Conduct
Independence and Self Reliance



Goals, current and future

Goals are focused in the present. Few plans for getting there…

Now….

- Get an education
- Find a better job
- Make some money

Before I leave this earth…

- Entrepreneur
- Financially comfortable
- Take care of my family

- Difficulty thinking too far down the road
  - The future is about tomorrow, a week from now, two months from now
- Goals are general and grounded
  - Their familiarity with responsibility has affected their discussions about the future
- No plans in motion
  - They’re not moving towards their goals in the present

Army Perceptions

Gut Reactions – Army

The Army is a last resort - an escape or something to do if you've got no idea where you're going…

Relevance

- Strong personal anecdotes/associations
- Image: Stiff, rigid, formal

The Positive – descriptions are distant

- Benefits
- Respected/Appreciated for protection and security
- "Gets you on the right path."

The Negative – descriptions are emotional

- Aversion to combat
- Changes life as you know it
- Not considered an elite option
- Impact – "Makes you crazy."

Being Black affects their perception of the Army

“A black man has no place in the white man's Army”
Boyz in the Hood 1991

- Racial experience in the U.S. affects sense of patriotism and thereby reaction to the Army
  - Don’t owe the government or the country
    “What do I owe them. What am I going to give them. What have they given me?”

    “An immigrant comes over here and doesn’t pay taxes for months, years. We’re working at McDonalds and they take it all.”

    “I tried to get money from my insurance company after my house was flooded. I’ve worked for this country all of my life. They looked at me like I was a criminal. You want me to give them my life?”

- At least it’s an even playing field
  - Believe that the Army is more fair than corporate America for a Black man
    - “In the Army they kick everyone when they’re down, Black or White.”

Impact of 9/11?

Their reactions did not motivate them to join

- Captured their attention and stirred this audience…to a degree
  - Angry because it was on home-turf
  - Motivated, but not enough to join

Impact of War with Iraq?

Combat is the number one reason why they don't want to join

- Disagree with the politics (Bush is not favored)
- Don't want to leave their families
- Don't want to be in combat

The Soldiers' Perspective

- Soldiers joined for the same reasons civilians said that they would
- Life in the Army is more "natural" than they expected
- Combat Arms aren't appealing because they don't want to fight

Thought Starters

A Lack of Freedom

Situation

- The power of independence as influenced by life values and life style
  - A pillar of self respect

The Army Story

- Stripped of your freedom
- Denied self-expression
  - Style
  - Music
  - Language
  - Wake-up schedule

Opportunity

- Share what life is like, as the soldiers explained it
  - Playing cards, playing basketball, hanging with your peers

Instant Gratification

Situation

- Concerned with the present, and vaguely aware of the future
  - Current plans are simple, centered around money, and focused on immediate benefits
- There are no plans in the works for making their immediate goals a reality
  - They need to know that they'll see results for the decisions they make in a small window of time

The Army Story

- Recognition that the Army offers a package
  - Benefits
  - A new life-style on a different "track"

Opportunity

- They're looking for facts – straight up. Keep it simple and to the point. The message must be direct and relevant

Story Tellers

Situation

- Stories are their main sources of knowledge
  - Through rap artists in the entertainment realm, and the power of word of mouth in their community, the tradition is oral and intimate

The Army Story

- What they know about the Army they've pulled from stories told by people close to them
  - Many of these stories are negative and without success or accomplishment

Opportunity

- To be influential, a story must feel truthful, it must be relevant and it must be from a credible source
  - Communicate the raw and real stories of people close to them , both in lifestyle and philosophy

An Ideal Community

Situation

- Respondents crave a strong, supportive community of their loved ones and peers
- When asked “Who’s got their back?” the list is short
- America, “the government” is not their community

The Army Story

- This audience considers friendship and community important elements of a good life.

Opportunity

- Emphasize the support system and strength of unity
- Offer the Army values of loyalty and service as they pertain to friends and peers, rather than to country